Teacher Preparation, Orientation and Expectations in a State School with Indigenous students: a Human Rights Issue?

Abstract

In this paper, issues are examined concerning the preparation, orientation and expectations of teachers who were appointed to a state school within a remote Indigenous community. The data were drawn from critical case study research undertaken in this school over several years. Issues in this paper are examined from the point of view of how they impact upon the Indigenous students' human rights in relation to their educational experiences. Human Rights in education are defined according to appropriate international and national documents as they relate to education for Indigenous peoples.

Introduction

The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education recently released its final report (March 2000). This paper draws upon some of the terms of reference of the HREOC Inquiry in order to critically discuss whether the preparation, orientation and expectations of non-Indigenous teachers in an Indigenous community state school affect the human rights of Indigenous students, in relation to the nature and quality of their educational experiences. The data used in this argument were drawn from a critical ethnographic case study undertaken at a Torres Strait Island High School.

The Torres Strait is located between the northern tip of the Australian continent, Cape York Peninsula, and Papua New Guinea. The Islands of the Torres Strait are divided into five main regions, spread out across the 120km strait (Fuary, 1993: 172). The Torres Strait is officially a part of the state of Queensland but, in recent years, has moved to develop an interim level of local government which will serve as a model of self-government in the future (Jull, 1997: 4). Torres Strait Islanders live all throughout Queensland and other parts of Australia, but Fuary (1993: 166) noted that the Torres Strait itself remains the spiritual, ancestral, geographic, economic and social core of Torres Strait Islanders.

Being accessible only by plane or boat, the Torres Strait is easily defined as a remote region of Australia, despite its sizeable population of 8000 people, of which 6500 are Islander or Aboriginal (Jull, 1997: 5). Nearly 4000 people, Islander and non-Indigenous, reside on Thursday Island, which is the administrative centre of the region (TSRA, 2001).

The government schools in the region are staffed by Education Queensland, and as such, the majority of teachers are non-Indigenous and/or non-Islander. Research within a particular high school in the region has uncovered that many non-Islander teachers at the school were unfamiliar with the region before receiving their transfers and knew very little about Indigenous education in general and Torres Strait Islander culture in particular (Whatman, 2000).

This context illustrates the significance of the paper's focus upon teachers' preparation, orientation and expectations when they arrive in an Indigenous community state school in a remote region, and how their subsequent actions affect Indigenous students' human rights in education.

In determining human rights, in relation to education, there are many pertinent documents to provide the necessary definitions. The primary document in defining human rights is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, incorporating Articles 1, 6 and 13, which specifies that Australian Indigenous students are entitled to educational experiences which;

- *foster social and cultural development (Article 6.2);*
- *develop a sense of dignity (Article 13.1);*
- *promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all racial groups (Article 13.1);*
- *are free and appropriately accessible (Article 13.1b)*

*(*http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/k1drc.htm)

The Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1959) is another significant international agreement that provides relevant guidance to the nature of educational experiences for Indigenous students. In particular, Principle 7 states:

> *The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgement, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.*
>
> http://www.hreoc.gov.au/news_info/rural/n1_9_9_1.html#7

Furthermore, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP, 1986) have stated that Indigenous students are entitled;

> *…to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as…artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature…*

International law also guarantees Indigenous communities, such as the Torres Strait, the

right to determine their own educational priorities and to establish their own educational institutions, as well as the right to be taught their own history and culture. Article 27 of ILO 169 states:

> *1.Education programmes and services for the peoples concerned shall be developed and implemented in co-operation with them to address their special needs, and shall incorporate their histories, their knowledge and technologies, their value systems and their further social, economic and cultural aspirations.*
>
> *2.The competent authority shall ensure the training of members of these peoples and their involvement in the formulation and implementation of education programmes, with a view to the progressive transfer of responsibility for the conduct of these programmes to these peoples as appropriate.*
>
> *3.In addition, governments shall recognise the right of these peoples to establish their own educational institutions and facilities, provided that such institutions meet minimum standards established by the competent authority in consultation with these peoples. Appropriate resources shall be provided for this purpose.*

Thus far, international covenants have stipulated the right for Indigenous students to free and accessible education in general, the right maintain and protect cultural heritage in all its forms, and the right for Indigenous people to make decisions about education for Indigenous students. Remote schools such as those found in the Torres Strait, with obvious access issues, should be aware of these over-arching principles.

Part of protecting cultural heritages relates to the maintenance of Indigenous languages. As Nicholls (1999) has argued, Indigenous language use is an identity affirming and culturally appropriate approach in schooling. Therefore, Torres Strait Islander students have the right to learn their own languages in school, as supported by Article 28(1) of ILO 169:

> *1.Children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong. When this is not practicable, the competent authorities shall undertake consultations with these peoples with a view to the adoption of measures to achieve this objective.*

The fundamental right of promoting local languages through the school curriculum is balanced against the need to acquire the language of the wider society. Therefore, Torres Strait Islander students must have the opportunity to learn and master the English language, as Article 28(20) states:

> *2.Adequate measures shall be taken to ensure that these peoples have the opportunity to attain fluency in the national language or in one of the official languages of the country.*

The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which has not yet been adopted by the General Assembly, sets out several rights pertinent to education;

> *15.Indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State. All indigenous peoples also have this right and the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Indigenous children living outside their communities have the right to be provided access to education in their own culture and language. States shall take effective measures to provide appropriate resources for these purposes.*
>
> *31.Indigenous peoples, as a specific form of exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, including culture, religion, education, information, media, health, housing, employment, social welfare, economic activities, land and resources management, environment and entry by non-members, as well as ways and means for financing these autonomous functions.*

Following on from Article 31, on a national level, an important document for ensuring the culturally appropriate education of Torres Strait Islander students is the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1993:4) is based upon four main principles: *the involvement of Indigenous peoples in educational decision making; equality of access to education; equity of educational participation; and, fair and appropriate education*. Whilst critics, such as Nakata (1993), have argued that the policy is not prescriptive enough in its attempt to foster community participation in educational decision-making, it is, never-the-less, a fundamental starting point for culturally appropriate decision-making and teaching when working in schools based in Indigenous communities, such as the Torres Strait.

Having defined the areas in which educational human rights can be achieved, the terms of reference for the HREOC Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education need to be summarised. In this paper, the following terms of reference are addressed;

- *teacher incentives, professional development and retention;*
- *the cultural appropriateness of education services to Indigenous children and their communities.*

(HREOC, 1999: 1).

The two are inextricably linked in terms of what cultural knowledge non-Indigenous teachers possess about the Torres Strait when they first arrive; what opportunities are they provided with to learn more about their local culture whilst they are working within the community, and finally; how quickly the teachers do (or do not) acquire the appropriate cultural knowledge before moving on to a new teaching position, hence beginning the cycle once again. The impact upon students will vary, according to the above phenomena, and so one of the purposes of this paper is to explore whether or not the vagaries of staff turnover in a particular school impinge upon students' educational human rights.

The use of a critical but single case study in this paper can serve as a useful model of inquiry for similar contexts in other communities around Australia, and indeed, other countries where teachers and students work together in culturally diverse settings.

The Issues

Induction into Torres Strait Islander Culture

The opportunity for induction for teachers arriving in remote, culturally diverse regions has been highlighted as an issue affecting cultural relations. In the past, teachers have cited no opportunity for induction, or the programs that have been offered have only operated once at the start of the academic year. Teachers were leaving and arriving at the school every term, so three-quarters of arriving staff missed out on induction once they arrived, whilst others noted that they had no opportunity to learn anything before they accepted their posting due to time constraints:

> *Q* *When you got your first posting, did the department of education have any information for you?*
> *A* *No, I got told about 2 days before school started. So, I just had to get up here. There was no information, nothing sent to me. But there is a video and an information pack than some people got. I didn't get it.*
>
> (interview transcript, male teacher).

> *The school didn't even mention it when I started here. Didn't even show me any policy documents. Or anything. And also, the only cultural stuff we did was some in-service on custom.*
>
> (interview transcript, male teacher).

The accounts of the few staff members who did receive the induction workshop at the start of the academic year indicated that it was very useful:

> *Yes we had that. We had, well especially being first year, we had a meeting every Wednesday afternoon. And the first time, they sort of took me around to various places and showed me what they were. We had like, cause I was in the meetings every Wednesday afternoon, we had cultural awareness. Everyone who is new to the school goes to that for the first week. We learned about Islander culture, and we had guest speakers come in to help us learn about the Torres Strait culture*
>
> (interview transcript, female teacher).

Again, with such a majority of teachers being non-Islander, and mostly unknowledgeable about their new environment when they arrive, induction opportunities are critical. Cultural awareness and induction into Indigenous communities has been cited by various documents as essential for Indigenous education, including the NATSIEP (DEET, 1993) and the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Yunupingu, 1995). Teachers who undertook cultural induction agreed

with its' purpose and obvious benefit. Thus, remote schools should make every endeavour to ensure ALL teachers are given the same opportunity for induction.

Awareness of Relevant Policies & Policy Dissemination

With the multitude of policies and international declarations on the educational rights of Indigenous students, it could be expected at least a small proportion of the policies to be commonly understood by teachers, at a school with a majority of Indigenous students. This was not the case, as confirmed by this typical response to a question relating to awareness of Indigenous education policies:

> *I wouldn't say that they are the type of things that are really obvious in schools here at all. You don't arrive and they hand you a policy handbook or something like that*
>
> (interview transcript, female teacher).

If a teacher is not aware of a policy or preferred curriculum arrangements within a given community, they cannot be expected to find out without any assistance. Education Queensland, through the school administration, has the prime responsibility for ensuring the information is disseminated to teachers as they arrive in the community.

However, conversations with senior policy officers within Education Queensland have highlighted the frustration they have experienced with the dissemination of such material:

> *Anything with an Aboriginal design or logo of some sort on the cover gets handed straight over to the Aboriginal liaison person within the school. Admin don't even look at it*
>
> (interview transcript, Indigenous Education policy officer).

So, while this paper asserts that Education Queensland needs to ensure the people at the coalface are receiving the information, workers within the system are encountering difficulties with doing so. Clearly, new approaches to the dissemination of this information need to be trialed. It could be as simple as repackaging information so that it is not arbitrarily deemed by school administration as being 'for the Aboriginal liaison person'. Or, more complex methods of dissemination and verification mechanisms might need to be explored, especially with the increasing reliance on information technology for communication. Either way, the current situation of 'lost' policies and teacher ignorance of such policies cannot continue to exist without negatively affecting the educational experiences of Torres Strait Islander students.

Teacher Incentives

Education Queensland has identified the Torres Strait as a remote area under the Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS). Under RAIS, teachers are entitled to relocation allowances and salary 'topups' for moving to what is generally regarded as a very expensive, and sometimes difficult, place to live. However, many teachers do not view RAIS as being a successful strategy to overcome the disadvantages, personally financially and career-wise, for moving to the Torres Strait:

> *About offering cash bonuses and that. But that's been a big flop anyway. The tax is just immense, so a lot of people are worse off than they were before. What sort of incentive is that for people to stay?*
>
> (interview transcript, male teacher).

A former Admin member insisted that 'more money is not the answer' to getting administrative staff and non-Islander teachers to stay longer. He cited the example of another remote community in which he had worked: more money would not have enticed him to stay there one day longer, because of the lifestyle and other problems. In the Torres Strait, the travelling gets to him - he is *'sick of flying, and spending all day to get somewhere*' (interview transcript). Financial remuneration for teachers transferring into the region were rejected by the majority of teachers as an appropriate incentive for retaining staff at the school.

Professional Development

Due to the school's relatively small student population, varying between 350-400 students, it had a limited budget, with very small allocations for teacher professional development. This is a common feature of many remote schools (Eckermann, 1999; Macdonald, 1994). However, the Torres Strait has the added difficulty of being accessible only by aircraft from Cairns or by boat from Cape York Peninsula. The sheer cost of travel, coupled with limited options, makes opportunities for professional development extremely limited, if not non-existent;

> *I mentioned professional isolation as a possible negative factor, to which he agreed. The former deputy gave the example of when the Science Teacher's Association sent a fax to the school, advertising a meeting in Cairns for 4-6pm on a Thursday afternoon. "Ludicrous", was how he described it! Budget for conferences and things were also mentioned. I told him that a teacher had said they get $250, which does not even pay for airfare. He agreed this was a problem, and gave a round figure of $40 000 being necessary to give teachers adequate money for professional development, which is just not possible with their budget, being dependent on student load (360 students in 1997).*
>
> (record of interview with deputy principal).

Remote regions are doubly disadvantaged in terms of opportunities for staff development as conferences and seminars are rarely held in remote places, reducing their accessibility for people in remote schools, and the cost of travelling from the remote area to the usual city locations is also prohibitive. A possible option for remote schools is to be subsidised by Education Queensland to increase teacher access to professional development, either by providing airfares and travel expenses, or by encouraging professional organisations to hold their conferences and seminars in rural and remote areas.

Retention

Perceptions that the Torres Strait is a less desirable teaching destination have affected the transfer and retention rates of teachers at the high school. One of the Deputy Principal's interviewed strongly disagreed with common misperceptions about the Torres Strait held in the teaching profession:

> *[this] is a good school and a much better community and standard of living than many other places. It suffers from an image problem which isn't accurate, to a great extent … the images of racial unrest, primitive living, and uncontrollable school children are just not true. There is always potential for racial conflict or disagreement, but that is never imminent. Many non-Islander and Islander people can, and do live very happily on the island*.
>
> (interview transcript, Deputy Principal).

As a result of poor perception, as both a place of work and community to live in, the school does not necessarily attract teaching staff who will remain in the community for extended periods of time. A former Admin member described three typical categories of teachers who arrive on staff;

"a) the young graduates who think they've been sent to the worst school in Queensland and can't wait until their time is up. They don't make friends, are very lonely and don't fit in to T.I. life at all…they tend to have the most behaviour problems in their classes as well;

b) the refugees : who are getting away from the city, and have no particular interest in that school or community - as long as it is far away from where they were before. These people are running away from something, and generally, contribute little to the school in the long term;

c) the upwardly mobile, principal hopefuls - the teachers who want H.O.D. jobs (and can achieve this at an earlier age in remote schools), with a view to eventually getting admin positions. These teachers are prepared to stay in a remote school for a bit longer than the mandatory two years, as it give them more 'brownie points', which will help with promotion. They also tend to initiate new programs etc, as this will look good as well, on the CV. The commitment to innovation is there, but the best interests of the students are not necessarily the main motivation!"

(record of interview with former admin member).

The essential problem with such teachers on staff, in terms of their impact upon students' experiences, is that a general lack of commitment may exist or their commitment is perceived to be non-existent by the community. One of the Islander teachers at the school commented particularly on the way staff turnover was perceived by the community:

> *Yeah. It's very difficult because people do two years then they take off. You know, admin is no different….Well, (former admin staff member) – he's done two years and he's out of here. So, you know, pretty much to the day that he arrived.*

> *He arrived mid-year, he's leaving mid-year. And the previous Principal was the same. So, I don't know what that does for community perceptions of the school either… they're just using it as a stepping stone to get somewhere else. Not all of them have been like that, but some, it has been very obvious. And if it's obvious to us, then it's obvious to the community. Yeah, I always get (community) people asking me about it as well.*
>
> (interview transcript, male teacher).

With such a high turnover of staff, the ability of the school to foster effective relations with the community has been compromised. The community looks upon new staff members with a past-justified sense of cynicism, which the new staff members do not fail to notice, starting a new cycle of indifference and, sometimes, hostility.

Staff turnover also affects the quality of curriculum planning and implementation. With staff leaving at every term, entire departments can be replaced within one year, as occurred in the Home Economics department at the time of interviewing. New staff members have enough to cope with as it is, let alone being expected to take a pro-active role in developing new curricula. In larger, city schools, new, young teachers can reasonably expect to fit into a larger department with more experienced staff who take the major responsibility for curriculum planning. As Eckermann (1999) noted, in remote regions like the Torres Strait, teachers do not have that luxury.

They also do not have the opportunity to see their curriculum efforts develop over time:

> *I mean, I've only been here for a year, K's only been here for a year. You need to be here five years to get things like that set up properly. I mean, we've done different things, set up a few things since we've been here, but things like that take a long time to get going*.
>
> (interview transcript, female teacher).

The high turnover of staff, particularly administrative staff, is also problematic in terms of the school's direction in policies and curriculum. Each new principal and deputy principal brings new expectations, priorities and preferences to the job which, coupled with high turnover, results in an destabilising effect on the school. This can only be to the detriment of the students:

> *The school will have been through 3 Principals and 3 Deputies in 18 months - incredibly destabilising, as each admin person brings their own ideas with them*
>
> (interview transcript, deputy principal).

These comments about staff turnover, and how they may impact upon the education rights of Torres Strait Islander students, also need to be balanced against the right of teachers to determine their own career paths, and choose where and for how long they work in a particular place. You cannot force teachers to stay when they want to leave, so the emphasis has to be on finding the right kind of incentive for the right kind of employee. Some people will never believe that incentives offered are enough to stay in the region to bring stability to the teaching staff, and, hence, the school curriculum. So, strategies need to be implemented which identify the 'right people' for the job – people who bring commitment to the community to their work (not just commitment 'to

their job') and find rewarding incentives to match the people.

Cultural Appropriateness of Teaching Approaches

The cynicism which greets new staff members does not only originate from parents and other community members. The school students have also been quite critical at times of their learning experiences with teachers. Sometimes, the criticisms arise from a conflict in understanding, mismatches in students and teachers conceptions about teaching and learning:

> *"[We need a] better deal for the students…Teachers really showing, when they're teaching students about any of these topics, really put their impressions into it….Because sometimes, they just talk and talk and talk, and you just sit there and get really bored….And they just show the same videos and that, and we don't really get much from just watching a video…Or just doing research. Students don't do research. We just sit there and yarn. It's boring, I mean, we need to learn. Like, they are supposed to teach us.*
>
> (interview transcript, female student).

This student's expectations about what makes a good teacher echoed the 'warmth and demandingness' criteria that Fanshawe (1999: 41) described. Students expect to be challenged to work hard in their classrooms, but under conditions that offer encouragement and promote a sense of belonging (Malin, 1998).

Other students expressed a desire for a particular style of teaching in health education which was not being adopted by teachers at the school;

> *They need to get someone who's suffering from smoking or heart disease or something. And if they voluntarily came in and gave a talk about what they're suffering and coming from a person who knows, and not someone who's guessing or is just quoting statistics… and that, it would be more effective, I reckon.*
>
> (interview transcript, female student).

The preference for reality teaching was also corroborated by the experiences of health workers who periodically taught at the high school:

> *We've noticed that visual stuff has more of an impact. Especially with island people, they are more visual. If you stand in front and talk talk, they just switch off…And um, but if you show them something, you get their attention. It's like with island people, you have to show them first before they believe*
>
> (interview transcript, female Islander health worker).
>
> *And its through sharing life experiences, or anything that is through drama or you know. Anything to make them think "gee, I'd like to find out now what to do" sort of thing.*
>
> (interview transcript, male Islander health worker)

> *And the thing is, one of the things that really makes them think is, once you relate them to their family experiences, you know? Talking to "Uncle so and so", or "big brother so and so". Who was in that car accident, or who got lost in the boat because he had...once they make the link with that, pry into that experience - that's their relative, or they know this person, and he was young. You can see it on their faces when people are learning and when people are not. You can see when somebody is switched off. But most of them switch on with family experiences*
>
> (interview transcript, male Islander health worker).

Such 'stimulating, imaginative and original' approaches, as outlined by Fanshawe (1999: 44) have been well documented in Indigenous education. Regardless of the teachers' intentions in the way they structure learning activities, the feedback given above indicates that there has been a mismatch in the expectations of students about how they should learn and how teachers should teach. A cultural basis underpinning this misunderstanding cannot be discounted. Yet, with the minimal levels of cultural knowledge which many teachers bring with them to the school, and the short periods of time they stay at the school, the opportunities for improving teachers' cultural understanding are quite limited.

Of course, learning opportunities are to some extent prescribed by the syllabus. Senior students in particular are expected to demonstrate 'autonomous learning', self-directed research and the like. This type of learning was strongly criticised by some senior students who questioned the relevance of such an approach to their needs. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (DEET, 1993: 4), and Articles 27 and 31 of the ILO indicated that relevant, enjoyable and useful educational opportunities should be offered to Torres Strait Islander students. Such learning opportunities should be developed in conjunction with communities with a view to transferring full responsibility over the to communities in the future (Articles 27 and 31). With a school staff which is two-thirds non-Islander, and little or no opportunity for community members to have input into the traditional curriculum areas of the school (not just ''Islander studies''), the school is a long way off achieving these aims.

Language Issues

One third of the teaching staff at the school are Islander, and can therefore, use and promote local languages in accordance with Human Rights Declarations. The remainder cannot. Creole (or 'Broken') is not offered to teachers who arrive in the community (for example, as a TAFE subject) so apart from picking up a few words from community talk, non-Islander teachers are unlikely to acquire the language sufficiently well to promote it with their students. Article 28 (1) cannot be substantially fulfilled at present.

Also, the Torres Strait community has strenuously lobbied for intensive English language programs for their children at school. This is in accordance with National policy, the National Indigenous English Literacy Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) and Article 28 (20). So, the school has an English literacy program which emphasises the acquisition of good English speaking and written standards across every discipline. Focusing time and energy on promoting English is sometimes at odds with allowing students to use Creole in the classroom. Teachers have mentioned this as a problem.

'Breaking the Cycle'

Many of the issues addressed in this research paper have been commented upon before, in other research articles such as Macdonald (1994), Eckermann (1999), Stewart (1999) and Tripcony (1999, 2000), and in policy review documents, such as the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Yunupingu, 1995). Getting serious about the implementation of numerous existing policies, and incorporating some recently launched initiatives, may provide a key to improve the educational experiences, and human rights, of Torres Strait Islander students. For example, the MCEETYA (1995: 16) Indigenous Higher Education Strategy clearly enunciates the need for compulsory Indigenous studies in teacher-training courses. Whilst this policy pre-dates the tertiary training of the participants in this research, most universities around Australia still do not have compulsory Indigenous studies in their teacher-preparation programs. Therefore, many future teachers in remote regions will still be denied the opportunity to learn a modicum of knowledge, and develop their own perspectives on Indigenous issues before being posted to an Indigenous community school.

With the 'drain' of expertise from remote schools, due to teacher turnover and initial teacher inexperience, documents such as What has worked (and will again) The IESIP Strategic Results Projects (DETYA, 1999) can provide teachers with 'case studies' from other communities which may assist them with their own professional practice. More specifically, Education Queensland has published a strategy for improving outcomes for Indigenous students and communities entitled Partners for Success (Education Queensland, 2000). There are individual policies contained within the overall strategy for collaborative agreement on standards of education, literacy approaches, employment of Indigenous peoples, with the capacity to formalise such agreements into binding charters (Education Queensland, 2000: 2-3). These policies have clear implications for the human rights of Torres Strait Islander students.

Conclusion

There are many issues affecting the educational experiences of Torres Strait Islander students. The teachers at the school were working within the paradigm of what they knew best - mostly a coping mechanism - which were not necessarily the best procedures for a remote school. The teachers are not being indifferent or overtly racist in their approaches to teaching in this particular community. Inappropriate practices were mostly the result of poor information dissemination, disabled communication channels between education stakeholders, unfair working conditions (and expectations), 'fall-back' coping strategies only used in the absence of something better, and a myriad of other causes which cannot be simply attributed to poor professional practice of teachers.

Some basic tenets of Human Rights concerning the education of Torres Strait Islander children are not being fulfilled due to logistical, structural and systematic factors mostly beyond the influence of individual teachers. These include the inability to teach in local languages wherever possible (due to a majority non-Islander staff), and the un-likelihood of the community eventually taking control of educational organisations, as state schools are not 'community controlled' schools (Downey and Hart, 1999: 14). Students

sometimes cannot see the relevance or applicability to their individual situations of mainstream teaching approaches, so relevance will always be difficult to demonstrate.

With the multitude of existing and new policies concerning outcomes for Indigenous students, one would expect that preparation, orientation, and expectations of commencing teachers at this Torres Strait school can only improve.

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